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UNCLAS DHAKA 001437

SIPDIS

FOR I/FW, B/G, IIP/G/NEA-SA, B/VOA/N (BANGLA SERVICE) STATE
FOR SA/PAB, SA/PPD (LSCENSNY, SSTRYKER), SA/RA, INR/R/MR,
AND PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/ASIA/SA/B (WJOHNSON)

CINCPAC FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR, J51 (MAJ TURNER), J45
(MAJ NICHOLLS)

USARPAC FOR APOP-IM (MAJ HEDRICK)

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TAGS: KMDR OIIP OPRC KPAO PREL ETRD PTER ASEC BG OCII

SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Lebanon situation; Dhaka

Summary: English "The Daily Star" op-ed says that Bush administration favors rather a moderate approach now to Hezbollah, which can in turn persuade the group to seek and perhaps find some common ground with the Lebanese opposition despite Syria's tactical retreat in pulling back her troops from Lebanon.

Lebanon

"The U.S. Pursuing Israel's Agenda In The Levant?"
Independent English "The Daily Star" op-ed (03/28/05) says: The Americans call the members of Hezbollah terrorists but grudgingly recognize their virtues: the grassroots popularity, their courage, discipline, patriotism and selfless social service -- all rolled up in one. They are the only Arab force to inflict defeat on Israelis. The organization remains virulently anti-American and anti-Israel and its leaders have dismissed the U.S. and U.N. demand that its fighters lay down their arms. This perhaps negates the possibility of their being the catalyst of incipient changes in Lebanon. But Hezbollah is redefining itself -- edging away from the militancy and steadily raising its political profile. It already has 11 members in the parliament and the number will, the analysts reckon, increase manifold in the election in May. The subtle change the Hezbollah has been undergoing should placate much of U.S.' concern. But in the meantime there is no matching change in American stance particularly in disarming the Hezbollah, which has by now come of an age after witnessing many ups and downs of its fortune. They can neither be browbeaten or arm-twisted, nor can they be neutralized in Lebanon's politics. That the U.S. is aware of it is adequately reflected in its decision not to pick a fight with Hezbollah. Bush administration favors rather a moderate approach now to Hezbollah, which can in turn persuade the group to seek and perhaps find some common ground with the Lebanese opposition despite Syria's tactical retreat in pulling back her troops from Lebanon. The yet more crucial for Lebanon at the moment is to leave her alone to sort out her problems arising out of Hariri's death. Notwithstanding an US-Israeli game plan Lebanon's asset to preserve her sovereignty should be an increasingly political Hezbollah, of course, with her potent guerilla forces. The signs are already visible that, Hezbollah is already turning more nationalistic and less ideological. Apparently Hezbollah's future is in Lebanon and vice versa.

Chammas